

But Ellis was holding out; he and his next door neighbor Clete Johnson had an inflatable raft, scuba gear, and a plan: there were valuables down there in the submerged houses and stores, money and jewelry and the like, and the "Leahy & Johnson Salvage Company" sounded like an idea whose time had come.

DINNER

Ellis and his next door neighbor Clete have been able to catch dinner in the new lagoon behind their houses. They hook ocean fish — bonita, perch, yellowtail, sea bass — and clean them up right there in their back yards. They use serrated fishing knives to excise the lumpy tumors and the oozing lesions that have been showing up on the fish with increasing regularity. Clete slices away a tainted chunk of flesh, points to the sky with his knife and says, "It's the sun fuckin' 'em up; ozone's shot to hell." Ellis casts his line out and says, "Either that or the chemicals." Clete nods and re-baits his hook. "Yeah," he says. "All sorts of shit got covered up when that water rose."

They barbeque their catches, taking turns on each others' outdoor grills to save on briquets. Ginger, Clete's wife's little chihuahua, hangs around when they cook at Clete's house. The smell of searing flesh brings out the neighbors too. "Catch somethin' good today, guys?" they ask hopefully, and "What kinda bait you boys usin'?" But Clete and Ellis aren't big on invites. "Let 'em eat steak," Clete says.

Ginger, when no cooked morsels fall her way, sniffs out to the shore in search of stray pieces of hacked-off tumors or discarded guts that might have washed back up onto the lawn.

SHAMU BLUES

Ruth and Ellis Leahy hired a baby-sitter for little Roy so they could go out and watch a movie. "There's coke in the refrigerator and microwave popcorn in the kitchen cabinet, Donna," Ruth said on her way out the door. "C'mon, Ruth, God damn it," Ellis called to her from the porch. "We're gonna be late." "Keep your damned pants on, Ellis," Ruth replied, and then she said to Donna, "And please, honey, stay away from that lagoon. There's rumors goin' around that it's not safe anymore."

The lagoon lapped invitingly at the Leahy back yard, and Donna thought Ruth was just an overly cautious old fart, so she got little Roy into his bathing suit and stripped herself down to her bra and panties and they eased into the tepid water for a twilight dip. Roy was delighted. At two years old he could already swim like a fish. He squirted Donna with a spray of salty water from his mouth, and Donna laughed and breast-stroked out from the shore. And from the yard next door, Clete Johnson watched the girl. He wanted to warn her about the lagoon, about what had been happening, but he was afraid to say anything — the girl was in her underthings; he could get accused of lechery and get arrested. His wife wouldn't understand. The approaching wave made him break his silent vigil. "HEY, GIRL. GET THE FUCK OUTA THE WATER AND BRING LITTLE ROY WITH YOU! QUICK, GIRL!" he shouted. Donna spun around in the water with her arms crossed over her breasts to give him a dirty look. "FUCKING PERVERT," she yelled at him. The wave grew behind her; its crest sprouted a black fin, a sharp and evil crescent. Donna spun around to face it as its force began to lift her, and the carnivorous jaws of the killer whale burst from the wave's surface and scooped Donna up, chomped on her three bone-breaking times and swallowed her. Roy thrashed toward shore; Clete leaped the fence and jumped into the water and dragged him the last ten feet to safety.

Clete took Donna's clothes and stuffed them into a green plastic trash bag with a cinder block and rowed them out to the middle of the lagoon and threw them over the side. The story was that she disappeared, and little Roy showed up at the Johnson's front door, frightened and alone. Too many wrong conclusions could be drawn if the truth was told. Clete was a married man; he didn't need that type of trouble.

CRUSTACEAN BLUES

Clete Johnson piled sandbags three high along the edge of his back yard. Though the water level of the new lagoon (compliments of the melted ice caps) normally stayed below his property line, some of the super high tides — the full moon, 7.0 plus ones — would send salt water up onto the lawn, ruining it.

The sandbags solved his problem.

The cracks and crevasses between the sandbags attracted crabs — hard-shelled, big-pincer guys, bodies the size of the palm of a hand. Good eating. Many were the nights Clete would boil up a batch so he and Juanita could sit in